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It's the final holiday stretch at the Biden White House. The theme is 'A Season of Peace and Light'



The East Colonnade of the White House in Washington, is decorated for the holidays, Monday, Dec. 2, 2024.

Associated Press

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's the final holiday stretch for President Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, who has decked out the White House with some whimsical decorations to evoke the "peace and light" of the season.

The festive display includes a towering Christmas tree surrounded by an amusement park-style carousel, brass-colored bells and sleigh bells lining a hallway, and a ceiling design that mimics snowfall.

The first lady invited National Guard families to be among the first members of the public to see the decorations, which are based on the theme of "A Season of Peace and Light." She also spoke at a separate event held to thank the volunteers who helped with the monumental job of decorating the interior and exterior of the White House. "This would not be possible

without your work," she said. "It's been incredible to watch all of you transform this space year after year, and you traded time with families for hours of gluing."

More than 300 volunteers spent the past week decorating the White House's public spaces and its 83 Christmas trees with nearly 10,000 feet (3,048 meters) of ribbon, more than 28,000 ornaments, over 2,200 paper doves and some 165,000 lights used on wreaths, garlands and other displays.

The official White House tree, a towering Fraser fir from North Carolina that was anchored to the ceiling of the Blue Room after a chandelier was removed, sits at the center of a colorful carousel with reindeer, swans and other animals bobbing up and down on poles. The tree is awash in twinkling multicolored lights and three-dimensional holi-

day sweets like peppermints and ribbon candies. It also sports the names of every U.S. state, territory and the District of Columbia.

Guests enter the White House beneath a rotating starlight and quickly come upon the Gold Star tree, honoring the families of fallen service members. The tree is made of six gold-toned stars, one for each of the six branches of the military, stacked one on top of the other.

The bells lining the East Colonnade hallway are meant to symbolize the sounds of the holidays. The ceiling and windows upstairs in the East Room are covered with reflective decorations designed to create the feeling of snow falling. Silhouettes of people holding hands decorate the bases of two large Christmas trees that flank the center door of the room.

Light shines through colored glass ornaments and prisms in

the Green Room while paper doves in the Red Room carry messages of peace. Doves are also suspended overhead along the Cross Hall, which runs between the East Room and the State Dining Room. In the State Dining Room, a starburst made out of sugar shines above the massive gingerbread White House, which includes snow-covered South Grounds dotted with dozens of twinkling mini Christmas trees and a scene of people ice skating in a rink on the South Lawn.

The sugary confection — which is for display purposes only and never eaten — was built using 25 sheets of gingerbread dough, 10 sheets of sugar cookie dough, 65 pounds (29.48 kilograms) of pastillage, a sugar paste, 45 pounds (20.41 kilograms) of chocolate, 50 pounds (22.68 kilograms) of royal icing, and 10 pounds (4.54 kilograms) of gum paste. □



President-elect Donald Trump speaks during a meeting with the House GOP conference, Nov. 13, 2024, in Washington.

Associated Press

By JILL COLVIN
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump is

Trump demands immediate release of Oct. 7 hostages, says otherwise there will be 'HELL TO PAY'

demanding the immediate release of Israeli hostages still being held in Gaza, saying that if they are not freed before he is sworn into office for a second term there will be "**HELL TO PAY**." "Please let this TRUTH serve to represent that if the hostages are not released prior to January 20, 2025, the date that I proudly assume Office as President

of the United States, there will be **ALL HELL TO PAY** in the Middle East, and for those in charge who perpetrated these atrocities against Humanity," Trump wrote in a post on his Truth Social site. He added that, "Those responsible will be hit harder than anybody has been hit in the long and storied History of the United States of America. **RELEASE THE**

HOSTAGES NOW!"

It was not immediately clear whether Trump was threatening to directly involve the U.S. military in Israel's ongoing campaign against Hamas in Gaza. Trump allies have said he hopes there will be a ceasefire and hostage release deal before he returns to office early next year. □

Biden's broken promise on pardoning his son Hunter is raising new questions about his legacy

By COLLEEN LONG and ZEKE MILLER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's decision to go back on his word and issue a categorical pardon for his son, Hunter, just weeks before his scheduled sentencing on gun and tax convictions was a surprise that wasn't all that surprising.

Not to those who had witnessed the president's shared anguish over his two sons after the boys survived a car crash that killed Biden's first wife and a daughter more than a half-century ago. Or to those who heard the president regularly lament the death of his older son, Beau, from cancer or voice concerns — largely in private — about Hunter's sobriety and health after years of deep addiction.

But by choosing to put his family first, the 82-year-old president — who had pledged to restore a fractured public's trust in the nation's institutions and respect for the rule of law — has raised new questions about his already teetering legacy.

"This is a bad precedent that could be abused by later Presidents and will sadly tarnish his reputation," Colorado's Democratic Gov. Jared Polis wrote in a post on X. He added that while he could sympathize with Hunter Biden's struggles, "no one is above the law, not a President and not a President's son."

Biden aides and allies had been resigned to the prospect of the president using his extraordinary power in the waning days of his presidency to ensure his son wouldn't see time behind bars, especially after Donald Trump's win. The president's supporters have long viewed Biden's commitment to his family as an asset overall, even if Hunter's personal conduct and tangled business dealings were seen as a persistent liability.

But the pardon comes as Biden has become increasingly isolated since the loss



Hunter Biden steps into a vehicle as he leaves federal court, Sept. 5, 2024, in Los Angeles, after pleading guilty to federal tax charges.

Associated Press

to Trump by Vice President Kamala Harris, who jumped in to the race after the president's catastrophic debate against Trump in June forced his exit from the election.

He is still struggling to resolve thorny foreign policy issues in the Middle East and Europe. And he must reckon with his decision to seek reelection despite his advanced age, which helped return the Oval Office to Trump, a man he had warned time and again was a threat to democratic norms. Trump has gleefully planned to undo Biden's signature achievements on climate change and reverse the Democrat's efforts to reinvigorate the country's alliances, all while standing poised to take credit for a strengthening economy and billions in infrastructure investments that are in the pipeline for the coming years.

And now, Biden has handed the Republican a pretext to carry through with sweeping plans to upend the Department of Justice as the Republican vows to seek retribution against supposed adversaries.

"This pardon is just deflating for those of us who've been out there for a few years yelling about what a threat Trump is," Republican Joe Walsh, a vocal Trump critic,

said on MSNBC. "'Nobody's above the law,' we've been screaming. Well, Joe Biden just made clear his son Hunter is above the law."

Jean-Pierre said Monday from Air Force One that the president wrestled with the decision but ultimately felt his son's case had been tainted by politics, though she tried to thread the needle — insisting he had faith in the Justice Department. "He believes in the justice system, but he also believes that politics infected the process and led to a miscarriage of justice," she said.

But Trump has already made very clear his intent to disrupt federal law enforcement with his initial nomination of outspoken critics like former Rep. Matt Gaetz to be attorney general and Kash Patel to replace FBI Director Christopher Wray, who nominally still has more than two years left in his term. (Gaetz ended up quickly withdrawing his name amid scrutiny over sex trafficking allegations.)

Reacting to the pardon, Trump spokesman Steven Cheung said in a statement: "That system of justice must be fixed and due process must be restored for all Americans, which is exactly what President Trump

and it was his broken promise as much as his act of clemency that was a lightning rod.

He is hardly the first president to pardon a family member or friend entangled in political dealings. Bill Clinton pardoned his brother Roger for drug charges after he had served his sentence roughly a decade earlier. In his final weeks in office, Trump pardoned Charles Kushner, the father of his son-in law, Jared Kushner, as well as multiple allies convicted in special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation.

Yet Biden held himself up as placing his respect for the American judicial system and rule of law over his own personal concerns — trying to draw a deliberate contrast with Trump, who tested the bounds of his authority like few predecessors. Inside the White House, the timing of the pardon was surprising to some who believed Biden would put it off as long as possible, according to three people familiar with the matter who spoke to The AP on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter. It came just after Biden spent extended time over the past week with Hunter and other family members on Nantucket in Massachusetts, a family tradition for Thanksgiving.

"I believe in the justice system, but as I have wrestled with this, I also believe raw politics has infected this process and it led to a miscarriage of justice — and once I made this decision this weekend, there was no sense in delaying it further," Biden said in a statement announcing the pardon.

Some in the administration have privately expressed anguish that the substance of Biden's statement, including his claim of an unfair politically-tinged prosecution of his son resembled complaints Trump — who faced now-abandoned indictments over his role in trying to subvert the 2020 election — has been making for years about the Justice Department. □

California lawmakers to begin special session to 'Trump-proof' state laws

By TRÂN NGUYEN

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)

— California Gov. Gavin Newsom and state lawmakers returned to the state Capitol on Monday to begin a special session to protect the state's progressive policies ahead of another Trump presidency. The Democratic governor, a fierce critic of President-elect Donald Trump, is positioning California to once again be the center of a resistance effort against the conservative agenda. He is asking his Democratic allies in the Legislature, who hold supermajorities in both chambers, to approve additional funding to the attorney general's office to prepare for a robust legal fight against anticipated federal challenges.

Democratic Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel on Monday introduced legislation to set aside \$25 million for legal fees to respond to potential attacks by the Trump administration on state policies regarding civil rights, climate change, immigration and abortion access.

"While we always hope to collaborate with our federal partners, California will be ready to vigorously defend our interests and val-



California Gov. Gavin Newsom speaks during a press conference in Los Angeles, Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2024.

Associated Press

ues from any unlawful action by the incoming Trump Administration," Gabriel said in a statement.

California sued the first Trump administration more than 120 times to various levels of success.

"We're not going to be caught flat-footed," Newsom said at a recent news conference.

Trump often depicts California as representing all he sees wrong in America. Democrats, which hold every statewide office in

California and have commanding margins in the Legislature and congressional delegation, outnumber registered Republicans by nearly 2-to-1 statewide.

Trump called the Democratic governor "Newscum" during a campaign stop in Southern California and has relentlessly lambasted the Democratic stronghold over its large number of immigrants in the U.S. illegally, homeless population and thicket of regulations.

Trump also waded into a water rights battle over the endangered delta smelt, a tiny fish that has pitted environmentalists against farmers and threatened to withhold federal aid to a state increasingly under threat from wildfires. He also vowed to follow through with his campaign promise of carrying out the mass deportation of immigrants without legal status and prosecuting his political enemies.

Before the special session

begins, state lawmakers are scheduled to swear in more than two dozen new members and elect leaders for the 2025 legislative session. Hundreds of people also are planning to march around the Capitol on Monday to urge the Legislature to try to stop Trump's mass deportation plans. State Attorney General Rob Bonta said his office will protect the state's immigration population, while Newsom last week unveiled a proposal to revive a rebate program for electric vehicle purchases if the incoming Trump administration eliminates a federal tax credit for people who buy electric cars. Newsom is also considering creating a backup disaster relief fund for the wildfire-prone state after Trump's threats. Republican lawmakers blasted Newsom and his Democratic allies over the special session. Rep. Vince Fong, who represents the state's Central Valley farm belt, said California should work with the incoming Trump administration instead. "Gavin Newsom's actions are tone-deaf to the concerns of Californians who disapprove of the direction of our state and country," Fong said in a video on social media. □

More than 3 million travelers screened at U.S. airports in a single day. That's a record

By The Associated Press

Travelers heading home af-

ter the Thanksgiving holiday set a record on Sunday, as



Travelers line up to enter security checkpoints at San Francisco International Airport on Wednesday, Nov. 27, 2024, in San Francisco.

Associated Press

airport officers screened more than 3 million people. The Transportation Security Administration said Monday that it handled 3.09 million travelers on Sunday, breaking the previous record by about 74,000. That mark was set on July 7, also a Sunday after a holiday. Hundreds of thousands of travelers were delayed or had their flights canceled. Airlines canceled about 120 U.S. flights not an unusually high number and more than 6,800 flights were delayed, according to FlightAware.

The largest numbers of delays were at Hartsfield-

Jackson Atlanta International Airport and Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.

Monday was also expected to be a busy day. By midday, there were about 80 canceled flights and more than 2,000 delays. Amtrak rail service between Philadelphia and New York was temporarily stopped Monday because of damage to overhead electrical wires.

And some travelers trying to return home faced delays on the roads.

Traffic at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport came to a standstill Sunday eve-

ning, with the airport using social media to tell motorists to avoid one of the two main entrance roads. Some people posted on X that they missed their flights because of the gridlock. A DFW Airport spokesperson attributed the gridlock to "the high volume of holiday traffic in a compressed time frame." She said the airport deployed extra police officers to help get traffic moving.

The TSA had predicted that Thanksgiving week air travel would rise 6% over the same days last year, fitting a pattern of record travel in 2024. □

The International Criminal Court's chief lashes out at threats from Russia and a U.S. senator

By MOLLY QUELL
Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — The president of the International Criminal Court lashed out on Monday at Russia for targeting its prosecutors and judges over the panel's investigation of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and slammed comments by a U.S. senator threatening the court.

Judge Tomoko Akane said in her address to the annual meeting of the world's top war-crimes court that attacks against the ICC were shameful referring to Russia's arrest warrants for the court's chief prosecutor Karim Khan and several of its judges.

These individuals are "subjected to arrest warrants from a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, merely for having faithfully and diligently carried out their judicial mandate per the statutory framework and international law," she said.

Moscow issued warrants for Khan and the others in response to the ICC investigation and arrest warrants for Putin over the war in Ukraine.

The Japanese judge also had harsh words for U.S. officials, including Sen. Lindsey Graham, who has called the court a "a rogue and politically motivated organization" after the judges last month issued an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Graham said he was confident Donald Trump's incoming administration would "respond forcefully" to these actions by the court.

"The court is being threatened with draconian economic sanctions by another permanent member of the Security Council as if it was a terrorist organization," Akane said, without elaborating.

During his last term in office, Trump had sanctioned the court's previous prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, with a travel ban and asset freeze



Exterior of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, Wednesday, June 26, 2024.
Associated Press

for investigating American troops and intelligence officials in Afghanistan.

What is the ICC meeting about?

Monday's meeting marks the start this week of the Assembly of States Parties, which represents the ICC's 124 member countries, of the ICC's 23rd conference to elect committee members and approve the court's budget against a backdrop of unfavorable headlines.

The ICC was established in 2002 as the world's permanent court of last resort to prosecute individuals responsible for the most heinous atrocities war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression.

The court only becomes involved when nations are unable or unwilling to prosecute those crimes on their territory.

To date, 124 countries have signed on to the Rome Statute, which created the institution.

Those who have not include the United States, Israel, Russia and China.

The ICC has no police force and relies on member states to execute arrest warrants.

Warrants for Netanyahu and his ex-defense minister

The decision to issue warrants for Netanyahu and Israel's former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has been denounced by critics of the court and given only milquetoast approval by many of its supporters, a stark contrast to the robust backing of an arrest warrant for Putin last year over war crimes in Ukraine.

President Joe Biden called the warrants for Netanyahu and the former defense minister outrageous and vowed to stand with Israel. A year ago, Biden said the warrant for Putin justified and said the Russian president had committed war crimes.

France said it would "respect its obligations" but would need to consider Netanyahu's possible immunities. When the warrant for Putin was announced, France said it would "lend its support to the essential work" of the court.

Another member country, Austria, begrudgingly acknowledged it would arrest Netanyahu but called the warrants "utterly incomprehensible." Italy called them "wrong" but said it would be obliged to arrest him. Germany said it would study the decision. Member Hungary has said it would stand with Israel instead of

the court.

Global security expert Janina Dill expressed concern such responses could undermine global justice efforts, saying they really have "the potential to damage not just the court, but international law."

Milena Sterio, an expert in international law at Cleveland State University, told The Associated Press that sanctions against the court could affect a number of people who contribute to the court's work, such as international human rights lawyer Amal Clooney. Clooney advised the current prosecutor on his request for the warrants for Netanyahu and others.

"Sanctions are a huge burden," Sterio said.

Accusations against ICC's chief prosecutor

Also hanging heavy over the meeting in The Hague are the internal pressures that Khan, the chief prosecutor, faces.

The 54-year-old British lawyer faced allegations that he tried to coerce a female aide into a sexual relationship and groped her, according to an AP report in October.

Two co-workers in whom the woman confided reported the alleged misconduct in May to the court's

independent watchdog, which says it interviewed the woman and ended its inquiry after five days when she opted against filing a formal complaint. Khan was never questioned. He has denied the claims.

The Assembly of States Parties has announced it will launch an external probe into the allegations.

Khan, who took the floor after Akane, did not address the accusations against him or the threats against the court beyond saying the institution was facing "unprecedented challenges."

He instead highlighted his office's request last week for an arrest warrant against the head of Myanmar's military government, senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, for attacks against the country's Rohingya Muslim minority. Judges have yet to decide on that request. Khan also said he planned to request warrants related to Afghanistan and Sudan in the coming months.

Late last week, six countries including France, Luxembourg and Mexico asked Khan's office to look into possible crimes in Afghanistan since the Taliban took control in 2021. While Khan isn't obligated to open an investigation in response to such a request, historically court prosecutors have done so.

The court, which has long faced accusations of ineffectiveness, will have no trials pending after two conclude in December. While it has issued a number of arrest warrants in recent months, many high-profile suspects remain at large.

Also, ICC member states don't always act. Mongolia, an ICC member, refused to arrest Putin when he visited in September. Sudan's former President Omar al-Bashir is wanted by the ICC over accusations related to the conflict in Darfur, but his country has refused to hand him over.

"It becomes very difficult to justify the court's existence," Sterio said. □

Belgian court rules against state in a landmark case addressing its colonial past

By RAF CASERT

Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — A Brussels appeals court ruled on Monday that the Belgian state committed a crime against humanity in the case of five mixed-race women who were taken away from their Black mothers in infancy in a landmark case addressing the nation's colonial past in Africa.

The five women fought a legal battle over some six years to make Belgium recognize responsibility for the suffering of thousands of mixed-race children. Known as "métis," the children were snatched away from families and placed in religious institutions and homes by Belgian authorities that ruled Congo from 1908 to 1960.

A lower court had first dismissed their challenge in 2021 but they appealed.

"It is deliverance for my mother now that she finally has closure," said Monique Fernandes, the daughter of Monique Bintu Bingi, one of the five plaintiffs. "She finally has it recognized as crime against humanity," Fernandes told The Associated



Clockwise from top left, Simone Ngalula, Monique Bintu Bingi, Lea Tavares Mujinga, Noelle Verbeeken and Marie-Jose Loshi pose for a group photo in Brussels on Monday, June 29, 2020.

Associated Press

ated Press.

The initial ruling had said that the policy, even if unacceptable, was not "part of a generalized or systematic policy, deliberately destructive, which characterizes a crime against humanity" and had to be seen within its context of European colonialism.

Monday's decision also orders the state to pay dam-

ages of some 50,000 euros to each of the plaintiffs and Fernandes said it would help cover all the costs involved.

"We did not want to go for a moral symbolic euro since it would amount to some sort of insult after everything my mother went through," she said.

The five women, who are now in their 70s and 80s,

filed their lawsuit in 2020 amid growing demands for Belgium to reassess its colonial past in Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.

In the wake of protests against racial inequality in the United States, several statues of former King Leopold II, who is blamed for the deaths of millions of Africans during Belgium's colonial rule, have been

vandalized in Belgium, and some have been removed. In 2019, the Belgian government apologized for the state's role in taking thousands of babies from their African mothers. And for the first time in the country's history, a reigning king expressed regret four years ago for the violence carried out by the former colonial power.

Lawyers said the five plaintiffs were all between the ages of 2 and 4 when they were taken away at the request of the Belgian colonial administration, in cooperation with local Catholic Church authorities.

According to legal documents, in all five cases the fathers did not exercise parental authority, and the Belgian administration threatened the girls' Congolese families with reprisals if they refused to let them go.

According to the lawyers, the Belgian state's strategy was aimed at preventing interracial unions and isolating métis children, known as the "children of shame," to make sure they would not claim a link with Belgium later in their lives. □

A small migrant caravan sets out from southern Mexico but it's unlikely to reach the U.S. border

By EDGAR H. CLEMENTE

Associated Press

TAPACHULA, Mexico (AP)

— A small migrant caravan has set out from southern Mexico, heading north,

but is unlikely to reach the U.S. border after authorities broke up two other small caravans headed to the United States over the weekend.



A migrant caravan departs from Tapachula, Mexico, Dec. 24, 2023, on their journey north through Mexico seeking entry into the United States.

Associated Press

About 1,500 migrants mostly from Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti, Colombia, Guatemala and Honduras set out walking on Sunday from Tapachula, a city near Mexico's southern border with Guatemala. They set out at night, to avoid the scorching daytime heat in the region.

The two other small caravans had set out in November, after Donald Trump's election, but both were broken up weeks later by Mexican authorities. Some migrants were bused to cities in southern Mexico, and others were offered transit papers.

Some in the caravan that set out Sunday said they would be willing to stay and find work in the indus-

trial cities of northern Mexico. Most migrants cannot work, or cannot find work, in Tapachula, a city flooded with migrants.

Santos Modesto, a migrant from Honduras, said most of those in the caravan would say they want to get to the U.S. so they could "achieve a better life for their families."

"But I think a lot of people here, if there were opportunities in Monterrey and surrounding areas, they would stay there," Modesto said, "because there are a lot of Cubans and Venezuelans who would rather stay here than return to their country."

The migrants said they were also concerned that Trump may eliminate the

cellphone app CBP One that makes asylum claims more orderly after his Jan. 20 inauguration.

About 1,450 appointments are made available daily, encouraging migrants to get an appointment before they show up at the border.

"There are a lot of reports that he has said he is going to do away with CBP One, that there are going to be deportations, the biggest deportation, but you have to have faith in God," said Venezuelan migrant Francisco Unda, 38.

Trump has threatened to slap 25% tariffs on Mexican products unless the country does more to stem the flow of migrants to the U.S. border. □

Alto Vista chapel and its link to Aruba's origins

According to Etnia Nativia, in the 18th century most of the inhabitants of Aruba were indigenous who lived on the north coast, one of the largest communities lived in Alto Vista.

As they were very religious, they had a chief with the name of Antonio Silvester who guided them in the Christian life and it was he who decided to build a stone chapel with a roof of corn rods, which would serve as a place of prayer. In 1750 it was blessed by Father Algemesi who came from Coro-Venezuela and appointed Domingo Antonio Silvester as the island's first prosecutor in the name of the Spanish crown and Rome. In 1752 the prosecution passed into the hands of Antonio Silvester's son-in-law, Miguel Álvarez, who continued to guide the parishioners in their prayers.

According to the book, The History of Alto Vista by R.H. Nooyen, it is not known when Domingo Antonio Silvester came to Aruba from Venezuela. The elders believe Antonio was a Spaniard. In 1780, father Joseph Antonio de la Vega called Bernardino Sil-



vester, one of Antonio's sons with his wife Anna Cathalina Tromp, "neighbors and naturals of the island Aruba" and thus they became natives.

At the end of the eighteen century many inhabitants of the island died as a result of the black fever epidemic and since people believed that the Alto Vista area was the most infected, they began to build their homes further south within the Noord area, so the town of Noord began to grow into a community till getting its own Church. However religious festivals continued to be celebrated at this sacred native place, with the custom of arriving in procession to Alto Vista.

Two-hundred years after the beautiful time of Alto Vista, people can no longer see much of the town of Alto Vista from 1750. With a lot

of work they found the old foundations of the Church of the Queen of the Holiest Rosary to build a new chapel on the same place. The entire surrounding area was empty and desolated, making it hard to imagine that Alto Vista was a town at all. A hundred years later, people can see the remains of around twenty houses, some made of stone and others of clay. Nowadays, only around six of these houses remain.

South of the chapel in the yard two graves can be observed, there was the cemetery which father Pablo de Algemesi blessed. It is not certain, but it is believed that the two graves belong to Antonio Silvester and Miguel Alvarez, according to Nooyen. About 50 meters near the chapel there are



still the markings of an old house, where Antonio and Bernardino Silvester would have lived. About 200 meters from the chapel there is a water tank which the locals call Tanki Cacique. In the past this tank was closed. But mostly water was brought out from the Poz di Noord, a well dug in the sand.

The chapel can be viewed from basically any point in the north side, even from Paradera and Sero Plat. All the historical remains around the chapel provide us with an idea on how the old people of Alto Vista used to live. Don't miss the opportunity to visit a place of historical significance with a window to Aruba's past. □

Aruba to me



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Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook

page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from Silvia Sperling Canabarro and Ubirajara Pirillo Canabarro from Brazil.

They wrote to us saying: "Aruba to us is the reunion with peace. It is our beloved island. This is our 17th visit, the 3rd this year and with each visit we fall more in love with this place. When people ask me why we always come back here, I answer: Why another destination if we have already found paradise?"

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers! □

A guide for the perfect picture

Where to find the most Instagrammable places in Oranjestad



(Oranjestad)—Imagine, you're taking a stroll in the city center, and you want to take the most picture-perfect photo to show your friends and family back home and online. It seems like the perfect spot can be hard to find, but Oranjestad is full of great spots for a quick snapshot! Here are the most Instagrammable places in Oranjestad.

I LOVE ARUBA

Right on Paardenbaai Plaza, near the harbor entrance, you will spot a giant sign that reads "I LOVE ARUBA". A great first stop for a quick shot with the family, this spot is among the few that has become a favorite among tourists, especially those that are visiting Aruba through a cruise vacation.

Speaking of giant signs that read "Aruba" (be-



cause there can never be too many), there is another sign you can find along the Linear Park, in front of Talk of the Town Hotel. It may be a long walk from the harbor to get there, but while you're at it, check out these other spots along the way!

The sitting bull

Yes, you read that right; right in the heart of the city center, in front of the Crystal Casino in the Renaissance Mall, there is a black bull sitting on a bench, waiting for you to take a picture with it. Ok, so it's not a real bull, but "I took a picture with a sitting bull" sounds like a great conversation opener.

See if you can also spot the cow on the roof!

Wooden Swing on Plaza Daniel Leo

While you're in front of the Renaissance Mall, check out the wooden swing on the other side of the mall on Plaza Daniel Leo. Another favorite among visitors wanting a cute snapshot for Instagram. Just pass through the Renaissance Mall and find this gem in front of the back entrance!

Since you've made it this far, one question: How many blue horses have you spotted already?

Renaissance Dock

Last but certainly not least, the Renaissance Dock is the perfect spot to take a beautiful picture, especially at sunset. The dock is located behind the Renaissance Market Place, and runs from the Renaissance Marina up to Renaissance Beach and Wilhelmina Park. This spot offers a gorgeous view of the ocean and sunset, accompanied by the soft waves crashing on the shoreline. You may even spot some iguanas! □



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Fusion - Piano & Wine Bar | Shalom Body & Soul Spa | Treasure Cove
Magnet Perfume Jewelry & Cosmetics | The Lazy Lizard | The Market
Shalom Hair & Nails Bar | Twist of Flavors | Dunkin Donuts
Coming Soon: El Patio Tacos & Tequila



Food culture in Aruba

(Oranjestad) - Like many other cultures, an important aspect of the Aruban cultural identity is our connection to food and food traditions. The local food traditions consist of a melting pot of different cultural and religious eating habits and dishes.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

The routine of breakfast, lunch and dinner on the island is one that does not completely follow a European or American routine, despite the major influences from these parts of the world on our culture and way of living. When it comes to the three important meals of the day, most of the Aruban population follows a Latin-American influenced routine.

Breakfast

Breakfast in Aruba is quite simple: a cup of coffee or tea, some bread, and sometimes an egg. Sometimes, due to the need of a quick "to-go" breakfast, you may also find many snack trucks and cafes that sell sandwiches, pastechis (meat pie), arepas and empanadas early in the morning.

Main Meal

The main meal is typically eaten in most households around noon or in the afternoon. This can consist of meat, fish, and chicken—stewed or fried—with funchi (polenta) or rice with stewed vegetables. Often, fried or boiled plantain or pan bati (Aruban pancake) is included. Stews are a staple in Aruban cuisine and can be largely influenced by Latin-American and Latin/Afro-Caribbean Stews.

Some of the more unique stews and soups from the ABC Islands* include sopi di bonchi cora (red kidney bean soup with pig tail), sopi mondongo (tripe soup), carni stoba (beef stew), comcomber stoba (West Indian gherkin stew) and much more.

Dinner Time

Dinner time can vary significantly from household to household. Unlike the U.S. or in Europe, dinner time typically does not consist of a whole (warm) meal. Instead, the evening "meal" can typically consist of something lighter, like a sandwich, though it is not uncommon to see leftovers from the main meal reheated and eaten again. Tea and coffee are often also served with the evening snack.

(Religious) Holidays

Christmas is probably the biggest global holiday, and every culture has its own spin on what their Christmas cuisine entails. In Aruba, our Christmas cuisine is again largely based on Latin-American influences, most notably from Venezuela. Ayacas and the famous pan di ham* are two crucial holiday dishes, along with stuffed turkey, roasted glazed ham topped with pineapples, arroz con pollo (rice and chicken) and potato salad, among other items. Traditional drinks include ponche crema (Aruban eggnog), chuculati pinda (hot chocolate with peanut butter), and homemade fruit punch. Desserts include, bolo di pistachio (pistachio cake), bolo di cashupete (cashew cake), quesillo (flan), bolo preto (dark fruit cake), drigidek (gingerbread), pan boyo (bread cake)



and more.

Snacks and tasty delights

Besides meals and dishes that are eaten on the dinner table, Aruba also has a food tradition that includes snacks and other tasty delights that you may easily find around the island. These include, Saco*, basket, pastechi, kroket, deditos, Johnny cake and more. These snacks are usually sold at local snack trucks and cafes, often located on the side of the road. In the area of Tanki Leendert and Tanki flip, for example, there are many of these trucks parked on the side of the road and often open until late at night—offering tasty and filling snacks post night-life fun. □

*ABC Islands: Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao

*Pan di ham: Derived from the Venezuelan Pan de Jamon (rolled up bread with ham, raisins and olives)

*Saco: Saco literally means "bag". Saco contains fried potatoes, plantains, chicken (and ribs) and a Johnny cake, served in a paper bag.

Source: Voeding, voedingsgewoonten en gerechten op Aruba (Nutrition, Food Traditions and Dishes on Aruba) by Biblioteca Nacional Aruba

Prohibited by law: leaving the island with seashells, white sand or corals



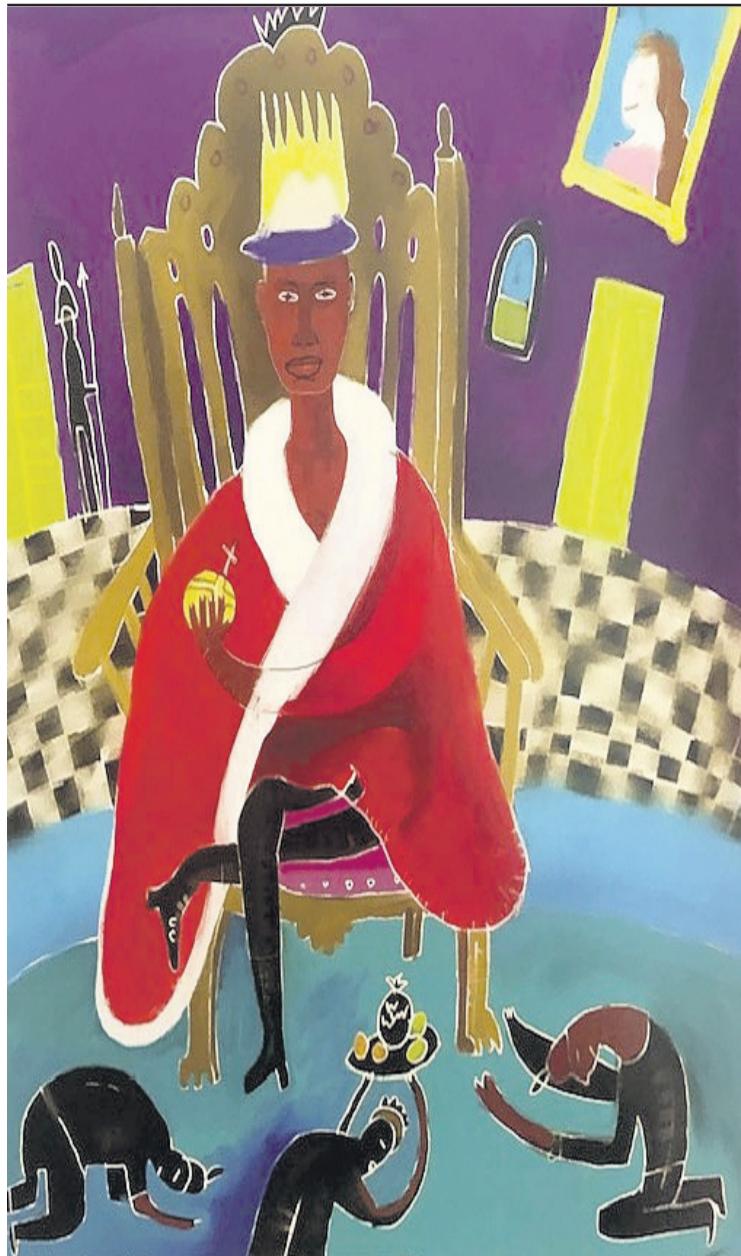
(Oranjestad)—Often times, the customs department at the airport intercepts many tourists leaving the island with seashells, white sand and/or corals as souvenirs.

Conforming to the international treaty of CITES and our local law which protects our Flora & Fauna, it is absolutely prohibited to take any seashell, sand and coral outside of Aruba. This is to protect our environment. The high number of seashells, coral and amount of sand confiscated is very strange and it is suspected that our own locals are the ones selling these to the tourists, which is unacceptable.

Upon confiscation at the airport, you can also

face a fine that they have to pay before leaving. This is surely not a pleasant experience for the tourist. This also leads to a negative reaction which can put our tourism in a negative light. Though we love to accommodate our visitors, let's all give nature the respect it deserves by protecting our environment. Stop collecting seashells, white sand and corals from our shores and stop buying or accepting these from local sellers or companies.

We want our future generations and visitors to enjoy the beauty of our beaches, shells and corals in a sustainable way, without destroying or disrupting the Aruban ecosystem. Help us protect what is ours! □



The stories of “Compa Nanzi”

(Oranjestad)—The most popular character you may hear about in the Caribbean is Anansi, known locally on Aruba as “Compa Nanzi”. Local children grew up hearing the tales of the conniving spider, and his legacy forms part of the oral narrative tradition that is common in Aruba.

Although the stories are most popular in the Caribbean, “Compa Nanzi” is not entirely unknown globally, especially not in the West African region. Brought to the “new world” by enslaved Africans from Ghana, the historical thread of how Nanzi was introduced on Aruba follows the enslaved Africans in Curaçao during the colonial era, which saw the biggest population of enslaved Africans in the Dutch Caribbean.

The stories of Compa Nanzi were a sign of hope for freedom among the slaves, who passed around different stories involving the famous spider through word of mouth, due to not being able to express their native culture in the new world. These stories were a way to not only preserve their culture, but it acted as a medium for relief during the harsh treatment to which they were subjected to. It wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century that the stories of Nanzi were written down in different languages. However, not all stories are completely alike in every country, as is the risk of oral story telling. However, one thing will always be dominant in Compa Nanzi's stories: his sneaky ways to get what he wants!

How Nanzi fooled the king
One day Nanzi was taking a stroll near the castle of Shon Arei, the king. He had this sudden urge to walk in. He didn't think too much about it and committed to what he had in mind. It was a warm afternoon, and the castle personnel were taking their afternoon nap. Even the soldier guarding the castle door was fast asleep, snoring so loud that his beard bounced up and down on his chin. Nanzi just slipped past him, looked

back for a moment then walk right on in.

Nanzi stumbled upon the king's quarters. With all his excitement he sat in the king's throne, and put on his crown that was hanging on the side of the throne. It was very hot that day, and it wasn't long until Nanzi too fell asleep, right there on the king's throne. He was so deep in sleep and snoring so loud, that even when the king found him in his seat, Nanzi did not even notice.

Shon Arei was flabbergasted by the sight of Nanzi on his throne, wearing his crown. How disrespectful! “Soldiers, get him!” he commanded. Nanzi was sound asleep, but when the soldiers picked him up, he jumped from fright. By then though, the soldier already had him in their hold. “Put him in a sack, stitch it up and throw him in the ocean!” the king said furiously. Two soldiers immediately entered the chamber, took the crown off Nanzi's head and pushed him in a sack.

Nanzi was terrified; it looks like this time he won't get away with his schemes. To get to the ocean, the soldier walked a long distance, and where beginning to feel very thirsty. Luckily they passed by a pub, and decided to have a nice cold beer. They set the sack with Nanzi in it outside and went to enjoy the refreshments. Nanzi was still trembling with fear in the sack.

What is that he hears? A herd of sheep walking by? “Compadre, listen here!” Nanzi screamed as loud as he could. The sheep herder got close to the sack. “What is this?”

“Man, there is something very beautiful in here that you can see. It's very rare and strange, but indeed, there is something so beautiful in here that you've never seen or will ever see,” Nanzi told the herder.

The herder, very dumb, believed Nanzi's word. “Let me see!” he said.

“Well if you must insist,” Nanzi said, “I'll let you take a look, but only for a quick second.” The herder

opened the sack, and Nanzi immediately jumped out. Before the herder could even take a look into the sack, Nanzi pushed him in it, and the herder fell head first in.

Nanzi didn't waste any time, and closed off the sack real tight. He then picked up the herder's hat and starting walking behind the traveling sheep as if nothing happened. After a little while, the soldiers headed back outside to continue their journey. As they picked up the sack, the poor herder started screaming to let him out, but the soldiers ignored him, thinking it was Nanzi. Shon Arei went strolling a while later. He thought to himself: “This time Nanzi could not get away with his foolishness. He probably drowned in that sack ages ago.” That is why, when he saw Nanzi walk behind the herd of sheep on the street, he was flabbergasted again. “Nanzi! Aren't you suppose to be at the bottom of the ocean floor?”

“I was, Your Majesty,” Nanzi replied. But you know what, there is so many things to see down there in the sack! Like this herd of sheep. Seeing that they had no herder, I started walking behind them and gained their trust pretty quickly. At the bottom of the ocean there are so many wonderful things, like diamonds, and bags of gold. Chests of silver and other precious stones,” Nanzi told the king.

“What is that you say?” the king was intrigued. “I want to see it too!”

The king immediately demanded to his soldiers to be put in a sack and be placed in the ocean. Naturally, Shon Arei died because of this. He was never found again. Nanzi followed the soldier back to the castle, where sat once again on the late king's thrown and put his crown on. He took possession of all of Shon Arei's belongings, and lived the rest of his life as king. □

Story and pictures are from “Kon Nanzi a Nek Shon Arei (i otro kuentanan antiano di e araña sabi)” by Nilda Pinto.

A brief history of the California Light House



(Oranjestad)—At the furthest western point of the island, there lies the tallest structure on the island: The California Light House. Standing on top of a limestone cliff, this lighthouse oversees the entire island, offering one of few best views of the island and the surrounding sea. It is also one of the few monuments that hold a rich history.

The lighthouse was constructed in between 1914-1916, and its first keeper was a young trained lighthouse keeper from Curacao names Jacob Jacobs. Mr. Frederico Fingal was the last man to have occupied this position until 1962. Though his son, Mr. Romulo Fingal did not continue in his father's footsteps, he does have a special connection to the lighthouse. He sat down with our reporter and shared a bit of its history.

As Mr. Fingal explains, "In 1915, cargo donkeys were hired from Figaroa di Noord to help build the Lighthouse at Westpunt. The donkeys had to walk along the beach all the way to Westpunt carrying the cargo, poles, cement, and all these things. At that time, it was a difficult task until Aruba got its first truck. These things reflect how people could have accomplished this tremendous job with so little." Mr. Fingal said, "At that time, it wasn't a place for people to work. It was very challenging because it was full of goats and donkeys, and it was very isolated. There were no hotels or roads to get there. There was only a donkey trail. Those were the only means of transportation."

Mr. Fingal continues, "In 1939, I was born in the lighthouse, and my father was the last lighthouse keeper until he retired in 1962. After that, they removed the power cables all the way to the top. According to the story, we couldn't have the light ourselves because they dismantled it, and after many years, I heard that it is in a



train museum in San Nicolas, where we found this very special lens that, when the light shines through it, it reaches 30 kilometers out to sea." Mr. Fingal told our reporter.

The lighthouse has a long and very interesting history. The reason why the lighthouse was built, according to Mr. Fingal, dates back to the day when the cargo ship S.S. California sank because of the lack of light. In 1913, Aruba made a request to Curacao to build a Lighthouse at Westpunt, and the governor of Curacao responded to Aruba to come back in 1915 with a well-detailed plan. "During the First World War from 1914 to 1918, they had to wait for the light to be transported to Aruba because it was manufactured in France. At that time, there was no electricity, and the light was very interesting because it rotated with a kerosene lamp that planes used; clean kerosene," Mr. Fingal said.

Mr. Fingal discovered something very interesting about the lighthouse after much research

was documented in his book 'History of the Lighthouse at Westpunt.' He found many details: "I found out that the height of the lighthouse was due to the absence of electricity. There was also the presence of coral. There is a long steel cable from where the light is, and under the light, at the highest point, there is a hanging weight, a sort of pendulum that swings like that, with a weight that measures about 1 meter by 30 centimeters wide, which is a block of solid iron attached to a cable. When you release it upwards, it comes down, and the weight that comes down pulls it up, gradually. And while it comes down, the same weight that is descending causes many small wheels to turn in the opposite direction. The Lighthouse rotates from 6 pm in the evening, when the sun sets, until 6 am in the morning. During the entire night, the light shines on the lantern, it goes down 24 meters, and the Lighthouse is 30 meters high. It is designed not to collapse," Mr. Fingal explains.

Mr. Fingal further explains that in one night, the lighthouse rotates 4,320 times and consumes one gallon of kerosene for the whole operation. "At that time, the kerosene was supplied from the Lago refinery. Every day it was brought down, and to start the light again, they had to lift the weight up, so our job as children was to crank it and raise the weight back up in the evening when the light stuck, they would take it down again, and the light stayed down. That's how it worked for a very long time," Mr. Fingal explains.

Thanks to the Monument Fund Aruba, which worked hard and is currently in charge of the Lighthouse, Mr. Fingal is very happy with its preservation, along with all the renovations that have taken place. He hopes that the story of the lighthouse will continue to live on for future generations. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 39 High

1 Pay home
7 Rugged rock break

11 One-of-a-kind

DOWN

12 Valiant person

13 Sense 2 "Tomor-row"

14 Regarding singer

15 Movie-based toy

16 Toys with tails

17 Lowly worker

18 Target of modern mapping

19 Pull in

21 Relieve

22 Grotesque building features

25 Idler

26 Bible twin

27 Detaches, as a brooch

29 Arrests

33 Perfume

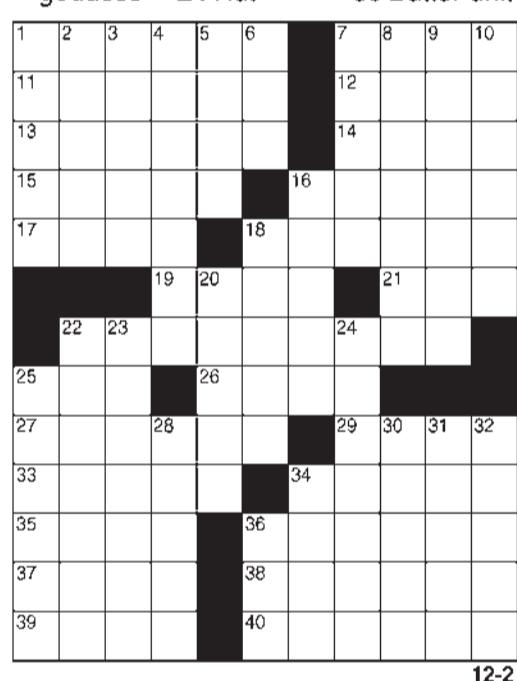
34 Asian capital

35 Sea dogs

36 Sarcastic

37 "Got it"

38 Up



A X Y D L B A A X R
is L O N G F E L L O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-2

CRYPTOQUOTE

QLKNZOI GOCMOR KR SMLO:

NZQN OEOITKLO OCVO ST QXO

MV QL QAPCN, DZOIOQV M QS

S O I O C T M L A M V X P M V O .

— SQIXQION QNDKKA
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WINTER IS NOT A SEASON; IT'S A CELEBRATION. — ANAMIKA MISHRA



Yesterday's answer

10 Spurred	25 Make
on	a raid,
16 Lake	perhaps
Turkana	28 Miniature
setting	map
18 Disgust-ing	30 Biscotti flavor
6 By now	20 Operative
7 Bike part	31 McCoy's nickname
8 Do	22 Magazine holder
museum work	32 Zodiac dozen
23 Current	34 Take on measure
9 Hunting goddess	36 Butter unit

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
11 12
13 14
15 16
17 18
19 20 21
22 23 24
25 26
27 28 29 30 31 32
33 34
35 36
37 38
39 40

12-2

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku

9	7		6	5	2			
5	6		3	7	2			9
	8		9			5		
	1	6		8	3			
3		4		7	6	1		
4	9				3			
1						5	6	
		5			8	9		
8		7	3	6				

Difficulty: ★★

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12/3

Answer to previous puzzle

5	7	3	8	2	1	9	4	6
6	2	8	5	9	4	7	1	3
1	9	4	7	3	6	8	2	5
4	8	6	1	5	9	2	3	7
2	3	1	6	4	7	5	8	9
9	5	7	3	8	2	1	6	4
7	1	5	4	6	8	3	9	2
3	4	9	2	1	5	6	7	8
8	6	2	9	7	3	4	5	1

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12/2

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

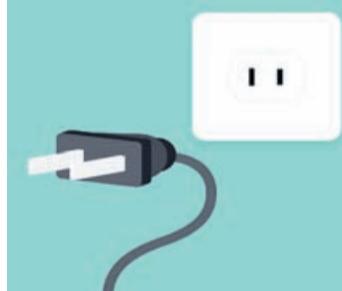
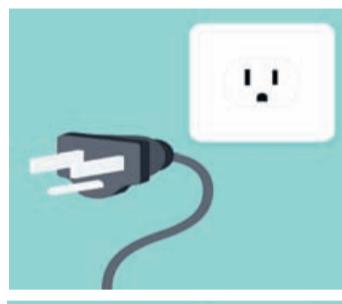
Supermarket hours



(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

lets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Electrical power



Drinking water



Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets:

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Safety



Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

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per points
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Johnnypaesch@gmail.com

For Rent

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Private islands
One bedroom sleep 4
Date : 3 January to 17 January
2025
Price : \$ 2000 each week
Call : 011-297-630-1307
Johnnypaesch@gmail.com

La Cabana Beach and Casino
Eagle beach
Christmas week
One bedroom sleep 4
Date : 19 December to 26 December 2024
Price : \$ 2000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Divi Phoenix

Palm beach
Two bedroom penthouse week
1 room # 770 with 22 weeks
remaining
Price : \$ 35,000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Eagle Resort

Eagle Beach
One Bedroom week # 2 room #
5538
Price : \$ 9000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

For Rent

Renaissance Ocean suites
Private Islands
Christmas week
One bedroom sleep 4
Date : 20 January to 27 January
2024
Price : \$ 2500
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Renaissance ocean suites

Private islands
One bedroom week # 2 room #
2325
Pool/ ocean view
Price : \$10,000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

La Cabana Beach and Casino

Eagle beach
One bedroom week # 51 room
329 A
Thursday day check in
Price : \$9000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Divi Phoenix

Palm beach
One bedroom week # 52 room
#953
One bedroom week # 01 room
#654
Contract expire:2058
Price : \$ 60,000 both weeks
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Divi Village Golf

Eagle Beach one bedroom
Sleep 4 week # 50 room # 2258
Birdie 10 with 24 weeks remaining
Price : \$ 8000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Divi Village Golf

Eagle beach one bedroom
Sleep 4 week # 51 room # 2258
Birdie 10 with 24 weeks remaining
Price : \$ 12,000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Divi Village

Eagle beach
One bedroom week 52
room # 3308
With 16 weeks remaining on the
contract
C- building elevator
Price : \$ 10,000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Divi Village

Eagle beach
One bedroom week 01 room #
3208
With 11 weeks remaining
C- Building elevator
Price : \$ 8000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Renaissance ocean suites

Private islands
One bedroom week # 51 room
2136
Ground floor garden ocean view
Price : \$ 12,000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Renaissance ocean suites

Private islands
One bedroom week # 51 and 52
Room # 2314
Garden view
Price : \$ 30,000 both weeks
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Renaissance ocean suites

Private islands
One bedroom week # 1 room #
2522
Harbor / ocean view
Price : \$10,000
Call : 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

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Platinum season
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San Nicolas

Imsan 24 hours
Tel.524 8833

PHARMACY ON DUTY

Oranjestad:
Eagle: Tel.587 9011
San Nicolas:
Centro Medico:Tel.584 5794

OTHER

Dental Clinic 587 9850
Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
Urgent Care 586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic
+297 588 0539

EMERGENCY

Police	100
Oranjestad	527 3140
Noord	527 3200
Sta. Cruz	527 2900
San Nicolas	584 5000
Police Tipline	11141
Ambulancia	911
Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

TAXI SERVICES

Taxi Tas	587 5900
Prof. Taxi	588 0035
Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba	583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

TRAVEL INFO

Aruba Airport	524 2424
American Airlines	582 2700
Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
Surinam	582 7896

AID FOUNDATIONS

Aruba Food Bank	Tel. 588 0002
FAVI- Visually Impaired	Tel. 582 5051
Alcoholics Anonymous	Tel. 736 2952
Narcotics Anonymous	Tel. 583 8989
Fundacion Contra Violencia	Relacional Tel. 583 5400
Centre for Diabetes	Tel. 524 8888
Child Abuse Prevention	Tel. 582 4433
Quota Club	Tel. 525 2672

General Info

Phone Directory Tel. 118

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ARUBA TODAY NEWS



HTTA Private Tours & Transfers. Transfers to & from Airport fee- \$65 one way.(max 4 persons) Transfers to & from dinner, parties, events fee- \$50 per hour. (max 6 persons).

Private Island tour to desired locations- \$100 per hour (max 6 persons).

Transportation will be all black Luxury Lincoln Navigator SUV.

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The map shows the location of Aruba Today and Bondia buildings in downtown Aruba. Key landmarks include the Royal Plaza Mall, High Rise Hotels, Weststraat, L.G. Smith Boulevard, and the Bus terminal.



Can AI chatbots make your holiday shopping easier?

By HALELUYA HADERO

Associated Press

Tired of thinking about what gifts to get everyone this year? Artificial intelligence chatbots might help, but don't expect them to do all the work or always give you the right answers.

Anyone scouring the internet for Cyber Monday deals is likely going to encounter more conversational iterations of the chatbots that some retailers and e-commerce sites have built to provide shoppers with enhanced customer service. Some companies have integrated models infused with newer generative AI technologies, allowing shoppers to seek advice by asking naturally phrased questions like "What's the best wireless speaker?"

Retailers hope consumers use these chatbots, which are typically called shopping assistants - as virtual companions that help them discover or compare products. Prior chatbots were mostly used for task-oriented functions such as helping customers track down online orders or return ones that didn't meet expectations.

Amazon, the king of online retail, has said its customers have been questioning Rufus - the generative AI-powered shopping assistant it launched this year for information such as whether a specific coffee maker is easy to clean, or what recommendations it has for a lawn game for a child's birthday party.

And Rufus, which is available for holiday shoppers in the U.S. and some other countries, is not the only shopping assistant out there. A select number of Walmart shoppers will have access this year to a similar chatbot the nation's largest retailer is testing in a few product categories, including toys and electronics.

Perplexity AI added something new to the AI chat-shopping world last month by rolling out a feature on its AI-powered search engine that enables users to ask a question like "What's the best women's leather boots?" and then receive



Amazon's generative AI-powered shopping assistant, known as Rufus, appears on a computer monitor in this photo taken on Dec. 1, 2024, in New York.

Associated Press

specific product results that the San Francisco-based company says are not sponsored.

"It has been adopted at pretty incredible scale," Mike Mallazzo, an analyst and writer at retail research media company Future Commerce, said.

Retailers with websites and e-commerce companies started paying more attention to chatbots when use of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence text chatbot made by the company OpenAI, went mainstream in late 2022, sparking public and business interest in the generative AI technology that powers the tool.

Victoria's Secret, IKEA, Instacart and the Canadian retailer Ssense are among other companies experimenting with chatbots, some of which use technology from OpenAI.

Even before the improved chatbots, online retailers were creating product recommendations based on a customer's prior purchases or search history.

Amazon was at the forefront of having recommendations on its platform, so Rufus' ability to provide some is not particularly groundbreaking.

But Rajiv Mehta, the vice president of search and conversational shopping at Amazon, said the company is able to offer more helpful recommendations

now by programming Rufus to ask clarifying or follow-up questions. Customers are also using Rufus to look for deals, some of which are personalized, Mehta said. To be sure, chatbots are prone to hallucinations, so Rufus and most of the tools like it can get things wrong. Juozas Kaziukenas, founder of e-commerce intelligence firm Marketplace Pulse, wrote in a November blog post that his firm tested Rufus by requesting gaming TV recommendations. The chatbot's response included products that were not TVs.

When asked for the least expensive options, Rufus came back with suggestions that weren't the cheapest, Kaziukenas said. An Associated Press reporter recently asked Rufus to give some gift recommendations for a brother. The chatbot quickly spit out a few ideas for "thoughtful gifts," ranging from a T-shirt and a keychain with charms to a bolder suggestion: a multifunctional knife engraved with the phrase "BEST BROTHER EVER."

After a 5-minute written conversation, Rufus offered more tailored suggestions

- a few Barcelona soccer jerseys sold by third-party sellers. But it wasn't able to say which seller offered the lowest price. When asked during another search for a price comparison on a

popular skin serum, Rufus showed the product's pre-discounted price instead of its present one.

"Rufus is constantly learning," Amazon's Mehta said during an interview.

Shop AI, a chatbot that Canadian e-commerce company Shopify launched last year, can also help shoppers discover new products by asking its own questions, such as soliciting details about an intended gift recipient or features the buyer wants to avoid. Shop AI has trouble, however, recommending specific products or identifying the lowest-priced item in a product category.

The limitations show the technology is still in its infancy and has a long way to go before it becomes as useful as the retail industry - and many shoppers - wish it could be.

To truly transform the shopping experience, shopping assistants will "need to be deeply personalized" and be able - on their own - to remember a customer's order history, product preferences and purchasing habits, consulting giant McKinsey & Company said in an August report.

Amazon has noted that Rufus' answers are based on information contained in product listings, community Q&As and customer reviews, which would include the fake reviews that

are used to boost or diminish sales for products on its marketplace.

The large language model that powers the chatbot was also trained on the company's entire catalog and some public information on the web, Trishul Chilimbi, an Amazon vice president who oversees AI research, wrote in the electrical engineering magazine IEEE Spectrum in October. But it's unclear how Amazon and other companies are weighting different training components - such as reviews - in their recommendations, or how exactly the shopping assistants come up with them, according to Nicole Greene, an analyst at management consulting firm Gartner.

Perplexity AI's new shopping feature allows users to enter search queries such as "best phone case" and to receive answers derived from various sources, including Amazon and other retailers, such as Best Buy. Perplexity also invited retailers to share data about their products and said those that do would have an increased chance of having their items recommended to shoppers.

But Perplexity CEO Aravind Srinivas, suggested in a recent interview with Fortune magazine that he didn't know how the new shopping feature recommended products to customers. But in an interview with the AP, Chief Business Officer Dmitry Shevelenko pushed back on that characterization, saying Srinivas' comment "was probably taken out of context."

The context, he said, is that with generative AI technology "You can't know in advance exactly what the output will be just based off of knowing what the inputs" are from the training materials.

Shevelenko said retailers and brands need to know they can't have their products recommended in Perplexity's search engine because they're "jamming key words" into their websites or using different techniques to show up better on search results. □

Dialing long distance: Harden joins Curry as the only NBA players to reach 3,000 3-pointers

By BETH HARRIS

AP Sports Writer

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) —

James Harden has joined Golden State's Stephen Curry as the only NBA players to reach 3,000 career 3-pointers.

Harden hit the milestone in the first half of the Los Angeles Clippers' 126-122 victory over the Denver Nuggets on Sunday night. He hit three 3s in the first half and three more in the second half while leading the Clippers with 39 points.

"Another one of those accomplishments that you never take for granted," Harden said. "The amount of work that I've put in countless days and nights where I put the work in a lot of people don't see it but the results happen, so I'm just thankful."

Harden just missed a triple-double, with nine rebounds and 11 assists.

The achievement finished off a standout week for the 35-year-old guard. Harden scored 43 points his most as a Clipper in a road win



Los Angeles Clippers guard James Harden looks toward the scoreboard after making a three-point shot that put him at 2,998 points for three-point shots during the first half of an NBA basketball game against the Denver Nuggets, Sunday, Dec. 1, 2024, in Inglewood, Calif.

Associated Press

over the Washington Wizards on Wednesday, his 100th career game of 40 or more. He joined Wilt Chamberlain, Kobe Bryant and Michael Jordan as the only players to do so.

"He had that first quarter

he reminded people, 'Hey, I can still go out here and drop 40 on you real quick,'" Nuggets coach Michael Malone said.

The Clippers are 13-9 without superstar Kawhi Leonard, who has yet to play this season while manag-

ing ongoing inflammation in his surgically repaired right knee. Harden has been tasked with carrying a greater offensive load in Leonard's absence as well as Paul George leaving as a free agent in the off-season. He has responded

and at times, like against the Wizards, his efforts have recalled his prolific scoring years with the Houston Rockets.

Malone noted that Harden has matured and responded to what's been asked of him as a point guard.

"He makes almost every key decision for their offense," the coach said. "He can beat you with his playmaking as well, and that shows you the talent, that shows you the quality of his game, where he's not solely the scorer."

Harden is also mentoring the team's younger players, a role he describes as "very, very comfortable" for him. "It's easy for me just because I've been in this situation for a lot of my NBA career. Just helping guys as much as I can to where it makes the game a lot easier for them," he said. "It's really fun."

Norman Powell said he and the other Clippers love to play with Harden because they know he'll get them the ball. □

WNBA season to tip May 16 with expansion Golden State Valkyries opening at home that night

By DOUG FEINBERG

AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — An expanded WNBA with more games and a new franchise will tip off on May 16.

The league extended its schedule to 44 games this year, up from 40, with the addition of the expansion Golden State Valkyries. The new team, which has over 20,000 season ticket deposits, will play its inaugural game at home on opening night against Los Angeles.

The WNBA is coming off a record season with its most-watched regular season in 24 years and playoffs in 25 years. Fans were also flocking to games with the highest attendance in over two decades. Last season's rookie class, led by Indiana's Caitlin Clark and Chicago's Angel Reese, were a big reason.

Their two teams will face off five times with the first coming on the opening Saturday. Clark's Fever will host the league's All-Star Game on July 19.

"We look forward to tipping off the WNBA's 29th season in May of 2025 and continuing to build on the success of last season, when the WNBA delivered its most-watched Draft and All-Star Game, and set records for viewership, attendance, digital consumption and merchandise sales," said WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert. "The upcoming free agency period and the 2025 WNBA Draft presented by State Farm will create a tremendous level of excitement, and we are also looking forward to the expansion Golden State Valkyries taking the court for the first time."

The New York Liberty will celebrate their first title with a ring and banner ceremony on May 17 when they host Las Vegas. The Liberty, who beat Minnesota in a decisive fifth game in last season's championship, will face the Lynx four times with the first meeting coming July 30.

All 13 teams will play the opening weekend.

The WNBA Commissioner's Cup will be played from June 1-17 with each team in the Eastern Conference having five games and Western Conference teams playing six. The top team from each conference will play on July 1 in the Cup Final.

The regular season ends on Sept. 11 with the expanded playoffs to take place after that. The league switched its format to a best-of-sev-

en finals this year and the opening round will go to a 1-1-1 format with the worse seeded team hosting Game 2. In the past, the better seeded team would get the first two games on their home court. The league will

hold its draft on April 14 with UConn star Paige Bueckers expected to go first to the Dallas Wings. The television and streaming broadcast schedule will be announced at a later date. □



LSU's Angel Reese, left, and Iowa's Caitlin Clark, right, pose for a photo before the WNBA basketball draft, Monday, April 15, 2024, in New York.

Associated Press

Protecting QBs from violent late hits like the one that leveled Trevor Lawrence isn't easy

By ROB MAADDI
AP Pro Football Writer

No one wants to see any player take a vicious hit like the one that knocked Trevor Lawrence out of the game.

It's easy to agree on that point. Eliminating violent shots is the hard part.

The NFL has instituted several rules to protect quarterbacks but football is a physical sport and players have to react instantly and make split-second decisions going at high speeds so injuries keep occurring. Lawrence was carted off the field in the first half of Jacksonville's 23-20 loss to Houston on Sunday after Azeez Al-Shaair leveled the defenseless quarterback with a forearm to the face-mask.

The late hit put Lawrence in the fencing position both fists clenched and he stayed on the ground for several minutes, while a brawl ensued. Lawrence didn't require hospitalization for his concussion but it's unknown when he'll return. "Thank you to everyone who has reached out/been praying for me," Lawrence wrote on X. "I'm home and feeling better. Means a lot, thank you all." Al-Shaair was ejected from



Jacksonville Jaguars tight end Evan Engram (17, right) jumps on Houston Texans linebacker Azeez Al-Shaair (0) after his late hit on quarterback Trevor Lawrence (16) during the first half of an NFL football game Sunday, Dec. 1, 2024, in Jacksonville, Fla.

the game and faces a fine and potential suspension after his latest unsportsmanlike penalty. The Texans' linebacker was flagged and later fined \$11,255 for a late hit out of bounds on Titans running back Tony Pollard last week. He was fined earlier this year after he punched Bears running back Roschon Johnson on the sideline in Week 2. That occurred during a scuffle that

started after his hard shot on quarterback Caleb Williams near the sideline that wasn't flagged.

Al-Shaair once got away with grabbing Tom Brady by the throat on a pass rush in a game between the 49ers and Buccaneers.

Outraged Jaguars players called Al-Shaair's hit "dirty" and Texans coach DeMeco Ryans made it known he didn't condone it.

"It's not what we're coach-

ing," Ryans said. "Want to be smart in everything we do and not hurt the team, get a penalty there. Have to be smarter when the quarterback is going down. Unfortunate play. Not representative of who Azeez is. He's a smart player, really great leader for us. We felt his presence not being there. His loss really affected us on the defensive side. Just not what we're coaching. Didn't want to

Associated Press

see the melee and all the aftermath. That's not what we're about. Not representative of us. I'll talk to Azeez, address him personally, and we'll move forward from it."

Fox Sports color analyst Daryl Johnston, a former fullback for the Dallas Cowboys, didn't hold back his criticism, calling it a "cheap shot."

"It's everything you're not supposed to do," Johnston said. "Everything. You'll see this in slow motion and Azeez Al-Shaair does everything you're trying to prevent in this situation. It's reckless. It's disrespectful. There's an honor that you give to your opponent on the football field and you respect him. And there's opportunities to be physical and give big hits and play this game in that manner. And there's other times when there's a respect that you grant to your opponent."

Some former NFL quarterbacks blasted Al-Shaair on social media.

"There is no place in the game of football for dirty hits like this one," Robert Griffin III wrote on X.

Chase Daniel called it "one of the dirtiest hits" he's ever seen on a quarterback. □

Djokovic said that he hired Murray as his coach because he knows him very well

Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina

(AP) — Hiring Andy Murray as his coach came naturally for Novak Djokovic. On a trip to Argentina to play in a farewell match for Juan Martín del Potro, the Serbian explained why he chose his former rival after being without a coach for six months.

Murray and Djokovic announced last week they plan to work together for the Australian Open in January. "Since I was very young, I have played against him... and there are not many people who have won multiple Grand Slam titles," said Djokovic

in Spanish in a press conference before the match against Del Potro.

Djokovic is a 24-time Grand Slam champion who has spent more weeks at No.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic gestures to the crowd during an exhibition tennis match against Argentina's Juan Martin Del Potro in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Sunday, Dec. 1, 2024.

Associated Press

1 than any other player in tennis history. Murray won three major trophies and two Olympic singles gold medals and finished 2016 atop the ATP rankings. He ended his playing career after the Paris Olympics in August.

Both men are 37 and were born a week apart in May 1987. They started facing each other as juniors and wound up meeting 36 times as professionals, with Djokovic holding a 25-11 advantage.

"He knows my game and everything that I have been through very well," added Djokovic, currently No. 7 in the ATP rankings.

"He knows the things that are wrong with my game, all of my mistakes."

Djokovic has been without a full-time coach since splitting in March from Goran Ivanisevic.

Del Potro, who won the US Open in 2009, won the exhibition match played in Parque Roca, Buenos Aires, 6-4, 7-5.

"We played against each other in the biggest stages of our sport, but in the end our friendship was bigger than the rivalry," added Djokovic.

"We are here to celebrate Juan Martin's career and to enjoy every moment." □